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OPINION

The return of the winter paunch is nothing to worry about — Just ask any squirrel

STEVE CORONELLA | FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

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As our bushy-tailed friends are aware, a winter paunch is a natural occurrence, like landscape-altering snowfall and post-storm arguments over parking space privileges. COURTESY PHOTO/FREEPIK at www.freepik.com

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Over the past couple of weeks there's been a familiar seasonal sig
around our Dublin house. The object in question usually appears when I'm

stepping into the shower or getting ready for bed, and it's a 100% reliable sign that summer and autumn have ended and colder spells are on the way.

I'm referring, of course, to the return of the winter paunch.

Until a few years ago, this predictable expansion of my midriff was a matter of some concern. Having remained relatively fit and trim from March to October, I considered it unseemly that I might need to start pushing my belt out an extra notch in late autumn, once the clocks went back, or perhaps even contemplate buying pants with an adjustable waistline.

Then I looked around me and saw this was the way things were meant to be. Every other mammal prepares for winter by plumping up. Unless flight is a possibility. In which case it's time to head south.

Around suburban Dublin – which has been my natural habitat since I moved to Ireland in 1992 – squirrels collect extra nuts and rely on a thickening coat to see them through until spring. Ditto for foxes, hedgehogs, and other metro scavengers. What makes the modern human animal so special that we can ignore this biological imperative?

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For everyone's sake, let's hope the author doesn't carry his winter paunch into next summer. COURTESY PHOTO/FREEPIK at www.freepik.com

Plus, I won't even mention the tantalizing appeal of a hibernation period. If you're a sports fan, the idea of spending the winter curled up on the couch, remote in hand, snacks at the ready, seems as perfect a natural design as one is likely to find. Especially if you have access to a streaming service featuring the top European soccer leagues, U.S. college football and basketball, and NHL hockey.

This approach is certainly more appropriate to the season than dressing up in Lycra leotards, throwing on an overcoat, sliding into the car, a heading for the gym. After an hour's exertion on a treadmill or a rowing

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machine, you're likely to emerge sweaty and red-faced. Then a week later, you've got a chesty cough and a temperature because you defied the natural way.

And before you say a word: I realize that in the 21st century it's no longer necessary to live like our ancestors, those hardy souls who worked their tails off during the finer months of the year, tilling and harvesting, and then wrapped themselves up tight, settled down in front of the fire, and waited for the first snows to fall.

I visited Plimoth Plantation as a quizzical fourth-grader and the place made a profound impression on me. I still remember the waxed paper windows and the dim, chilly interiors of the colony's rudimentary dwellings. The clothing and speech of the historical re-enactors working there transported me and my classmates to another world as well.

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On the bus back to school that day I remember thinking: I wouldn't care to live like that, thank you very much.

So I hear you: We have to move on. But surely we weren't meant to evolve into trendy exercise obsessives, grinding away precious hours on high-tech gym equipment, accompanied only by our own reflection and prejudice-affirming podcasts, as we turn the local health spa into a second home.

Which makes me think that maybe I was a bit hasty, all those years ago, when I dismissed the substandard living conditions in Colonial Massachusetts. Maybe what the early settlers lacked in household appliances (and modern workout equipment), they made up for with the sustained physical effort and mental determination they needed to survive.

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Or put another way: Long before TV was invented, the Pilgrims were the original American Survivor show. (Aided by a supporting cast of indigenous people in the locality.)

Now I'm not saying that leading an exercise-free life taps into some kind of robust pioneering spirit. Far from it. As anyone with eyes will attest, there are slight seasonal bulges, brought on by short-term indolence, and then there are the gargantuan tummy protrusions that can engulf even the largest of belt buckles. The line between the two is not as fine as you'd think.

Enjoy the winter paunch, says Steve Coronella, because in the spring it will be time to take it all off.
COURTESY PHOTO/GOTTA KNOW MEDFORD

What I'm arguing for is sense and moderation – though this is hardly the season for either, I suppose. Through circumstance or design, we eat more and move about less at this time of year. And that's just the way it is – unless you're a committed hunter-gatherer roaming the Maine woods for your daily crust or a diehard winter sports enthusiast who insists on "touching the void."

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In the end, maybe there's a happy medium. Maybe a winter paunch is a quite natural development, to be accepted (if not cherished), with the proviso that come the first flush of spring we'll take steps to send it packing.

For many of us, this arrangement should be enough to do the trick. Those few extra pounds – laid on during pleasant evenings in the pub with friends or as a result of one too many holiday hors d'oeuvres – will fall off naturally enough as the weather warms up and our lives become more outward-looking.

But the most effective motivation to slim down is the oldest of them all. I don't know about you, but I'm still vain enough to care about what kind of figure I'll cut on the beach next summer.

Medford native Steve Coronella has lived in Ireland since 1992. He is the author of "Designing Dev," a comic novel about an Irish-American lad from Boston who's recruited to run for the Irish presidency. His latest paperback publications are "Entering Medford – And Other Destinations" and "Looking Homeward - Essays & Humor from a Misplaced American."

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Salvation Army thanks Winchester for Red Kettle Campaign support

To the Editor: As we begin 2026, The Salvation Army Massachusetts Division would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the residents, businesses, and volunteers in the Winchester area who supported the 2025 Red Kettle Campaign. Your generosity and kindness during the holiday season brought comfort, hope, and tangible support

February 10, 2026

OPINION

Yes, Virginia...There is a Santa Claus

Editor's Note: Francis P. Church's editorial, "Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus" first appeared in The New York Sun in 1897, and was reprinted annually until 1949 when the paper went out of business. When it first appeared, it was an immediate sensation, and became one of

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Winchester in 2004. For more than two decades, the “Lights of Love” has illuminated our Town Center and downtown area all year round – a glowing tribute in memory of our deceased children, family members and friends whose

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

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